

U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (MI-04)

H.R. 784, to Amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to
Authorize Appropriations for Sewer Overflow Control Grants

Testimony before the Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

2:00 p.m., Thursday, July 8, 2004
2167 Rayburn House Office Building

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for granting me the time to discuss an issue much larger than the trillion dollar price tag it has carried over the last 20 years. The rebuilding of our aging sewer systems is not only about the safety of our drinking water, but also preventing pollution and protecting our beaches, lakes and rivers from wastewater overflows.

Beyond our homes, clean water supports a \$50 billion a year water-based recreation industry, at least \$300 billion a year in coastal tourism, a \$45 billion annual commercial fishing and shell fishing industry, and hundreds of billions of dollars a year in basic manufacturing. Clean rivers, lakes and coastlines attract investment in local communities and increase land values on or near the water, which in turn creates jobs, add incremental tax base and increase income and property tax revenue to local, state and the federal government.

The water is a way of life in my home state of Michigan. The Great Lakes not only define our borders, they define who we are as a people. In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that Great Lakes fishing industry alone generated about \$2.2 billion in sales to local businesses and that the industry represented \$4.4 billion in annual economic activity and about 75,000 jobs – and that was nearly 10 years ago.

In short, this legislation is about our nation's physical health, economic vitality and goes to the very core of the quality of life we have in our communities. I know this is an issue you all take seriously, and I want to particularly applaud the leadership of Congressman Pascarelli of New Jersey – a distinguished member of this committee – for working with me to find a solution.

Our sewer systems are rapidly eroding. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that 1,260 billion gallons of sewer overflow discharges occur every year. In less than a dozen years, more than half of the country's sewer pipes will deteriorate to the point of being in poor or very poor condition. Just four years ago, that number stood at only eight percent or roughly 600,000 miles of pipes. That means in the span of a mere sixteen years, well over 40 percent of our clean water infrastructure will be degraded and in serious need of repair.

Our systems are aging. Our population is growing. And, our local communities are literally drowning under the cost of repairs. If we don't act quickly, we could soon face pollution levels like we haven't seen since the 1970s.

The legislation that Mr. Pascrell and I are proposing, would be the first ounce of prevention well worth a pound of cure. By helping communities repair leaking and broken sewer pipes, we can sharply reduce the number of beach closures, ensure cleaner drinking water and prevent water pollution in rivers, lakes and along our coastlines.

I appreciate the willingness of the Committee to consider my legislation. I am hopeful the Committee will continue to move forward in its efforts to help America's communities better cope with the burdensome costs wastewater overflows pose and better safeguard residents from the public health and environmental risks associated with overflows.

Thank you.

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